

## **UKRAINE IN THE 21ST CENTURY: CHALLENGES FOR THE POLITICAL ELITE**

15 November 2003

The role, social functions and responsibility of the political elite are always at the centre of discussion, but this discussion becomes especially acute at the transitional stages of society's development. At such moments, the role of the political elite becomes critical, if not decisive — since the latter has to answer the challenges of the time of changes.

There is a great temptation to begin the list of the challenges with the geopolitical problems. Indeed, today, the whole world is undergoing transition from the former bipolar system to a new one, whose outline is being determined. The post-socialist Central European and Baltic states are joining the European Union — the community of developed democracies. Ukraine, too, has made clear its European aspirations. However, in the expression "joining the community of developed democracies", the key word is "democracy", not "joining".

In the modern sense, democracy means a rule of law state, socially-oriented economy, decent standard of living of the population, protection of private property, freedom of enterprise and developed civil society. It is primarily built within the country, and the above-mentioned community of developed democracies accepts such a country as a friend or a foe, depending on its progress in building democracy. Not all democratic states are EU members — but these enjoy the authority sufficient for provision of their national interests on the European and global scene precisely because they are globally recognised as democratic.

Ukraine, in contrast to the overwhelming majority of the post-socialist Central European and Baltic states, will not become an EU member next year. Not due to a great geopolitical game or because it "did not receive a signal" of the EU's willingness or unwillingness to see Ukraine as its member but because a country that has not attained the required level of economic development; has not guaranteed its citizens a decent, by the standards of developed democracies, standard of living and protection of human rights; that on the international scene is often associated with such words as "corruption", "temnyks" and "administrative resources" will never become a member of a community of democratic states united either institutionally or by a system of common values.

Therefore, the main challenge for Ukraine comes not from outside but from inside, is of a domestic nature and lies in the inconsistency of its present state with the criteria accepted in the democratic world. The current ruling political elite of Ukraine did not answer this challenge, although it had both enough time and more than enough power.

Next year, 2004, will be decisive for Ukraine not because the enlarged EU is closing its borders, and the chance to join it will fade away for an indefinite period, but because that will be the year of the presidential elections, that is, a chance to change the political team. Can any of the political leaders who have already decided to run for the presidency in the 2004 elections make a rapid and radical breakthrough to European values? Hardly. The inertia of 12 years of independence is too strong, the methods and goals of the leaders, both loyal to the authorities and oppositional, are too similar.

The shock for the overwhelming majority of citizens as a result of the unjustified and largely overstated expectations of the early 1990s is too deep. Indeed, society appeared unprepared for freedom and independence, in every sense of these words. Having been deprived for generations of democratic traditions, the ethos of private ownership and, finally, a sense of personal civic dignity, it could not be ready for that.

But — the political elite exists to show society the solutions for emerging problems,

to consolidate society and to lead it. The ruling elite failed to do this: on the contrary, it took full advantage of the split in society, its unpreparedness to live in the conditions of freedom, independence and democracy. All this led to social apathy and the lack of belief by citizens in their ability to change anything in their own country, the doubt of half of the population in statehood itself, its necessity and effectiveness.

This apathy and disbelief are already complicating the forthcoming presidential campaign. Even if a candidate willing to establish true democracy in the country wins the elections, it will be extremely difficult for him to regain public trust and consolidate society for the attainment of the national idea as specified in the Constitution — the building of a democratic, rule of law, socially-oriented state in Ukraine.

We have to be realistic. Ukraine should not expect a one-time breakthrough after the 2004 elections. The main thing is to keep the situation in the country under control and prevent a final slide to authoritarianism.

Because of this it is vitally important to ensure that the elections actually take place, provide for their maximally open, transparent character and prevent the focus of the discussion in the course of the election campaign solely on foreign policy issues — a trend and preconditions that are already visible. It is also important to realise what we and our political elite are, what to do and how to do it, for society and the political elite to be able to finally reach a consensus with each other and within themselves.

Is it worth judging our elite harshly? On one hand, it is what we are, the entire society in miniature. A cross-section. A reduction. We ourselves empowered the political elite to rule the state, or at least we did not strongly oppose its election or appointment to executive positions.

On the other hand — nobody authorised people representing the present ruling minority to take a burden beyond their strength and carry it on when it turned out that it really was beyond their strength. Were there many instances of voluntary resignation from high posts because of the inconsistency between high moral standards and the possibilities of a weak human being? Or to protest against the gap between the declarations and actions of the ruling elite?

The political elite: its authority and power

Elite — a group of people regarded as the best

in a particular society or organisation.

(Explanatory dictionary)

As is known, the elite is identified proceeding from two criteria: a formal one — the official status of a person; and a value one — the public status of a person, irrespective of his or her formal (official) status. Regarding the political elite, these criteria may be rephrased as follows: according to formal signs, the political elite are those who rule; according to valuation — those who deserve to rule.

Ideally, these criteria should coincide. In fact, the essence and goal of democracy presume the approach of society to this ideal. Democratic procedures and institutions are implemented, on one hand, so that those who rule are those who deserve to, and, on the other hand, so that those who deserve to rule to have such an opportunity.

Those procedures and institutions are not perfect, but theoreticians usually refer to the words of one who was not the worst from among those who ruled and deserved to rule, Winston Churchill: "Democracy is the worst form of government that man has ever devised, except for all those other forms that have been tried from time to time".

Two traits of democracy are worthy of notice in the context of the discussion about the political elite. First: under democracy, the duty and right to rule are assumed voluntarily. Hence, the responsibility before society for the results of such rule passes from the sphere of moral wishes into the sphere of legal imperative. Second: under democracy, society voluntarily delegates the duty and right to rule to the persons elected by it. Hence, it is correspondingly responsible for the results of the rule of those to whom it gave the power.

At the same time, those elected obtain, in addition to the duties, the legitimate right, ability and powers to apply means of compulsion to citizens. This latter circumstance in fact puts society and the elite on an unequal footing. The ruling political elite always appears in a privileged position and therefore bears greater responsibility for the state of society.

Giving credit

A government is to be judged by its action

upon men, and by its action upon things;

by what it makes of the citizens,

and what it does with them;

its tendency to improve or deteriorate

the people themselves, and the goodness

or badness of the work it performs for them,

and by means of them.

(John Stuart Mill)

We should give credit to Ukraine's political elite: over 12 years of independence, quite a lot has been done. The Ukrainian state became established from all formal viewpoints: the independence, sovereignty and inviolability of Ukraine's borders are recognised by the international community; the country has become an equal member of many international institutions and organisations, including the Council of Europe; co-operation agreements have been made with the leading international alliances — the EU and NATO. The acute conflict situations that arose from the issue of the Crimea's status, the problems of Russia's Black Sea Fleet stationing, Ukraine's acquisition of a non-nuclear status have been resolved.

The Constitution of Ukraine was passed, which declared our state ruled by law, socially oriented and democratic. There are some gains in economic transformation and the introduction of market principles: the process of privatisation is nearing completion, the class of big owners was formed, the fundamentals of small and medium-sized business were laid down, market infrastructure is being formed in the banking, financial and other sectors of the economy, the national currency has been introduced and has remained stable in recent years.

Public and political life saw the de-monopolisation of the ideological sphere and the formation of a multi-party system. There are also elements of civil society — public associations, non-governmental think tanks, independent printed and Internet publications.

Meanwhile, the social cost of the gains and the probability of future losses for society appeared too high.

According to the Razumkov Centre polls, the overwhelming majority of citizens reported that in Ukraine, their Constitutionally-guaranteed rights are not respected — the right to a decent standard of living for oneself and one's family (90% of the polled); to health care (81%); respect of personal dignity (79%); to work and fair remuneration for this work (79%); the right to social protection (78%) and other basic rights.

In Ukraine, official sources categorise people with per capita monthly income of \$65-120 as the middle class, being the social basis of civil society in democratic countries! According to the results of 2002, 28% of the population officially falls under the category of the "poor", and almost one in six — under the category of "destitute".

The average life expectancy in Ukraine is 73 years for women and 62 years for men, which is one of the lowest indicators in Europe. In Ukraine, people die ten years earlier than in the European Union member states. According to different estimates, from two to seven million citizens are working outside Ukraine. Over the period of Ukraine's modern history [since independence], its population diminished by 4 million people.

Hence, it seems logical to find out who in fact now constitutes Ukraine's political elite and why these individuals failed to do for the people what they should have done with their powers. They should be identified not simply by name but as a community, united, just as any community, by certain common traits, values and interests.

The second half of the

The "new" old elite  
The continued tragedy  
of the former Soviet country is that  
it has always had not so much a state  
as an egoistic ruling class indifferent  
to the common good, which never agreed  
to recognise the rules of behaviour  
that threatened its privileges —  
the laws of the market economy,  
or simply the establishment of the all-sufficient  
value of an individual person.  
(J.Leddon)

The present political elite of Ukraine is mainly, if not solely, identified by the formal indicator. It does not enjoy public recognition, authority or noticeable support in society. The level of complete support for the actions of the authorities (both institutions of power and individuals) does not exceed 8-11%; only 6% of citizens reported a positive attitude to the present ruling elite of Ukraine, the majority (53%) sticks to the opposite opinion, and almost a third (30%) is absolutely indifferent to the ruling elite. None of the top statesmen, none of the political leaders, neither loyal to the authorities nor oppositional, has a chance to be elected President in the first round, "if the elections took place next Sunday", and, therefore, does not enjoy the confidence and support of the majority of citizens.

Ukraine, in contrast to Poland, the Czech Republic or the Baltic states, has not seen the change of a "critical mass" of the political elite. We calculated that among the people appointed to the key positions in the system of governance in 1991-2003 (Prime Minister, Vice Prime Minister, Secretary of the National Security and Defence Council, Head of the Presidential Administration), products of the Communist, Soviet, economic and Komsomol nomenklatura of the Soviet period made up 73%; among those who occupied (or occupy) the positions of heads of regional state administrations since 1995 — almost 80%. As far as its bureaucratic component is concerned, according to the [Ukrainian] National Institute of Strategic Studies (NISS), 52% and 46% of executives of local and central bodies of power in Ukraine, respectively, have been in state service since Soviet times.

Another component of Ukraine's political elite is made up of the representatives of the "new bourgeoisie". The main task of its representatives was to find a "common language" with the representatives of the authorities for the conversion of power into property, and of property — into still greater power. The fundamental similarity of motives and tasks created the preconditions for the symbiosis of the nomenklatura and the "new bourgeois" elite.

Such a political elite proved extremely effective at attaining of its goal — formulation and protection of personal interests. This was clearly demonstrated, for instance, by the mechanism of privatisation implemented in Ukraine. According to expert estimates, 47% of big and medium enterprises were sold for privatisation certificates; 18 million citizens became their formal owners. The price of a certificate ranged between \$2 and \$10. In reality, today, the enterprises belong to a small group of oligarchs. This means that almost half of the industrial potential of a European country with fifty million citizens, created over generations, was sold via intermediaries to "insiders" at a price of one (admittedly large) aeroplane (up to \$180 million).

So, one should not overestimate the lack of preparedness of the Ukrainian political elite for state governance and the implementation of market reforms. Those "unprepared" have long, given our short modern history, been out of the political race. Those who remained in or came to power got their bearings promptly and surprisingly well in the cobwebs of business and "grey" economics and politics.

That elite does not need to undergo an initial course of strategic thinking: it is able to devise perfect strategies for its business. This is demonstrated by such a result of its activity as the present gap between the incomes of the small group close to the oligarchs controlling the most profitable enterprises and the majority of citizens. According to the official data, the ratio of the prosperity of the richest 10% to the most destitute 10% of citizens is 7.1, while a gap two-and-half times smaller is assumed to be acceptable, from the viewpoint of social stability.

Neither should this elite be taught to mobilise people for "implementation and achievement". It can organise "popular" acclamation easily, should there be a relevant order. But it is better and safer for that elite to avoid anything truly popular, for protests, strikes, and voting for candidates not appointed by the authorities may be popular, too.

The reason for the social ineffectiveness of the present Ukrainian political elite lies not in the absence of knowledge and skills but in the fact that it has no need to take into account the interests of society. Such a need may be dictated either by the moral principles of the elite or by effective mechanisms of its political accountability, or by the pressure of civil society. So far, the two latter factors do not exist in Ukraine. And the morals of the former nomenklatura and the new bourgeoisie do not envisage such a virtue as serving society. For the nomenklatura — because it is the former nomenklatura, for the bourgeoisie — because it is the new bourgeoisie.

The same NISS data show that two-thirds of the Ukrainian elite (including the political elite) is made up of the persons above 50 years old. Almost 87% come from villages or small towns that by way of life differ little from villages. Such origin is characteristic of the overwhelming majority of the present Ukrainian society that saw the physical extermination of the dynastic intelligentsia and the rapid urbanisation of recent decades.

The term "marginality" has acquired a negative tint in this country. However, initially, it did not (and does not) imply any assessment but only described the situation whereby a man or community appears at the juncture of any two cultures, and this gives rise to specific traits in the man or community, in particular — a combination of opposite complexes: of inferiority and superiority, aggressiveness and cowardice, credulity and distrustfulness, etc.

Furthermore, we as people who originate from villages and small towns preserve the traditional culture that, along with traits surely positive for the modern urbanised society, involves tribalism — "disposition to cultural and tribal socio-political separation", in simple words — provincialism, clannishness and nepotism.

These marginal traits are characteristic both in society and in the political elite. However, since the elite is public, despite all its secrecy arrangements, its tribalism and complexes are, first of all, well seen by society, and, second, due to the limitation of the circle of the ruling elite, these traits are especially vivid.

So, it is no wonder that our political elite requires compensation for a lack of public respect (and its own complexes) in the form of outward, formal signs of elite status: insignias, awards, scientific ranks and degrees, mass circulation of their "own" works, demonstrative consumption, purchase of "noble" titles.

Outward religiosity has become a sign of respectability for the present political elite. Decoration with church awards, sponsorship of church construction in the homeland and membership in church committees have become usual phenomena among political figures. It is clear, however that the seeming ascent of religiosity does not mean the ascent of morality. The worst thing is that such outward religiosity is actually promoted by the Church.

The pragmatism of the "new old" elite borders on cynicism, its ambition — on vanity, its effectiveness — on aggressiveness. It is doomed to reproduce the models and patterns of behaviour accessible to it, formed under Communist Party rule, overburdened with the marginal complexes and superimposed "criminal laws" of the new bourgeoisie.

Such an elite could only create a political system meeting its standards — and it did.

A political regime meeting the elite's standards

Every succeeding political regime knows how to be tougher than its predecessor. It knows the weak points of the previous system. The would-be elite may be noble — "we are not like them". Or it may not.

The Ukrainian post-Soviet elite chose the latter way. The period of "democratic euphoria" in Ukraine did not last long. Beginning in the late 1990s, the authoritarian trends in the activity of the part of the political elite grouped around President L.Kuchma began to gain strength. The parliamentary elections in 1998 and 2002 and the presidential elections in 1999 were increasingly undemocratic, as a result of the application of the administrative resource and "dirty" political technologies by the authorities. Those acts were aimed at the replenishment or partial "renewal" of the ruling elite with loyal individuals and the prevention of the enhancement of the political weight of the counterelite — the opposition.

As a result, the following became the specific traits and "national features" of the present political system.

Inadequate representation of social interests. The newly-established political institutions appeared democratic only in their form — their content does not meet the criteria of modern democracy. Consequently, today, no governing, public or political institution in Ukraine adequately represents the interests of citizens.

For instance, the representation of social interests in Parliament is becoming increasingly distorted. First of all, the factional structure of the Verkhovna Rada, and especially the balance of the ruling and opposition elite representatives, does not correspond to the political choice of citizens, due to illegitimate factors. Second, having come to Parliament, many deputies lose connection with their voters and consider themselves free from the slogans and promises proclaimed during the election campaign.

The political parties as centres of formation of the political elite do not adequately represent the interests of citizens, either. While in the first years of independence, parties were established mainly in response to social demand, and represented and promoted a certain political ideology, starting from mid-1990s they were increasingly used for the legalisation, defence and promotion of the interests of different groups within the elite.

The absence of mechanisms for the political elite's responsibility before society for the programme documents proclaimed or adopted by it. The Constitution does not envisage a report by the President on the performance of his election programme at the end of his term of office (which is especially important when the incumbent President is going to run for another term of office). It is actually impossible to bring the President to account under the impeachment procedure on the grounds specified in the Constitution, due to the absence of necessary legislative acts.

The main condition for the re-election of a member of Parliament in Ukraine is not the performance of his election programme but, in most of cases, the sum of money spent on his election campaign or the power of the administrative resource employed in his support. As far as the party elections are concerned, the system of political responsibility of the parties and blocs for the implementation of their programmes is only being formed. And so far, the pro-presidential bloc "For a United Ukraine!" permitted itself to "get dissolved" into the parliamentary majority without any consequences, leaving its voters to guess: who will create the one and half million working places promised by it, and when?

None of the Cabinets reported about the implementation of its programme on the way to resignation. The programme of V.Pustovoitenko's Cabinet, which worked for two years, was not even approved; the programme "Ukraine-2010", as well as most others, remained on paper as a monument to the unaccomplished ambitions and unfulfilled promises of the political elite.

Under the established practice, the programmes of political parties do not specify their responsibility for non-execution before voters or even party members. The election programmes of the parties are mainly of a momentary nature and are not intended for long-term or diligent work for their implementation.

Encroachment on the freedom of the mass media with the purpose of limiting the spread of critical (unbiased) information about the actions of the ruling elite. The use of means of political, economic, administrative and physical pressure on mass media and individual journalists acquired a mass character. In this way, the ruling elite deprives society of the ability to control its activity, since in the absence of unbiased media, citizens cannot learn how and in whose interests specific issues are resolved, and who influences political decisions.

Organisation of artificial public support (legitimisation) of political decisions by the ruling elite. The striking examples of recent years were the "all-Ukrainian referendum" in 2000 and the "public discussion" of the presidential variant of the political reform in 2003. Unfortunately, the ruling elite uses direct democracy for the attainment of its own goals, not

and the "public discussion" of the presidential variant of the political reform in 2003. Unfortunately, the ruling elite uses direct democracy for the attainment of its own goals, not for the country's benefit.

At the same time, these examples show that society is unprepared for active opposition to such attempts. The majority of citizens reported that they would not take part in protests, not only against violation of democratic principles by the authorities, but even in the event of a substantial deterioration in their own socio-economic standing. So, the political elite may not be afraid of public pressure that could make it act in the interests of society.

The refusal of the elite to accept the opposition (including the parliamentary opposition) as a political opponent necessary for constructive correction of their actions. The present ruling elite views the opposition as a threat to its status, power and property. This was demonstrated by the application of methods of administrative and forcible pressure against opposition political leaders and restriction of their access to the media. For instance, after the 2002 parliamentary elections, live airtime with known politicians where the opposition could present its opinion actually disappeared from the national TV channels. Administrative and forcible pressure is also applied to the businessmen who support the political opposition or whom the opposition represents.

The mainly "patron-client" principle of the human resources policy. Human resources policy is not transparent. The President usually makes his numerous dismissals and appointments of heads of central and local authorities without explaining the reasons. In many cases, officials dismissed for unsatisfactory performance of official duties were appointed advisors to the head of state. All this gives reason to guess that the main criterion for dismissal is not professional competence but personal devotion to the individual who has appointment power.

Therefore, the most striking features of the political system created by the new old political elite include the neglect of public interests, uncontrollability, irresponsibility and non-transparency. As a result, the gap between the authorities and society is widening; the authorities appeal to society only if there is a need for another social legitimisation of the extension of its powers or support for its political decisions.

The value system of the new elite

Will the opportunism, cynicism and amorality

that accompanied the ruination of the old

totalitarian system — let alone the barefaced

outburst of crime — give birth to the ethic

of high responsibility, which is an inalienable condition

of the existence of an effective industrial economy?

Today, an old ... joke sounds anew:

what is worse than socialism?

Answer: that, which follows.

(Ernest Gellner)

The political elite is public by definition, and as such, presents a model for society. Society, even when critically assessing its the political elite, follows it in its behaviour.

The political elite of Ukraine could offer society only the system of values it professed. The basis of the domestic political elite is the former nomenklatura, but with the removal of the one-party system, even those limitations that existed in the former nomenklatura environment disappeared: the inadmissibility of demonstrative consumption, the need to hide from the public anything that had the prefix "special" and the inevitability of punishment in the event an abuse becomes known to the public, especially if it is covered in the media.

For the majority of the representatives of the "new bourgeoisie" who integrated into the political elite, Ukrainian statehood was nothing more than a business project, a chance to take part in the privatisation of the national wealth. Patriotism was off the agenda. The criminal factor, was also present in the formation of the new elite.

As a result, a "detonating mixture", a symbiosis of two moralities was formed: the old, communist, with its principle of cringing before superiors and disdain for subordinates, and the venturesome morality of the "new bourgeoisie", with its disdain for the law. This is the reason for the prevalence of selfish (corporate, group) interests (first of all, economic) over the national ones. This is the reason for the extremely high level of corruption of the authorities.

According to Transparency International, when ranked by the rate of corruption, Ukraine now occupies 106th place out of the 133 countries covered by the survey. According to our polls, Ukrainian citizens see "the struggle with corruption and crime" as one of the priority tasks whose solution is critical for the country's future. In 2001, every tenth public servant was called to account for corruption. Corruption permeates the entire power structure from top to bottom, and the "standards" of such behaviour are established in the top echelons of state governance.

A confused society, to a large extent deprived of moral standards, obtained a "model" — the behaviour of the top representatives of the elite, whose main traits are adherence to the values of personal consumption, disdain for those who do not belong to the elite and have to abide by the general law and the common norms of morality. As a result, double standards are established in society. One set of standards is to be proclaimed from the rostrum, the other exists to attain selfish goals.

Through its behaviour — the declaration of moral values and their simultaneous neglect — the ruling Ukrainian political elite debauches society, which leads to the corrosion of moral values. People, especially the young, start to think that an "elite" position in society can be attained only in defiance of moral norms.

According to the polls, presently, 11% of the youth state that they do not submit to moral norms; 21% ignore the law; and 25% believe that the level and quality of education are unimportant in life, and the main thing is to have rich parents, relatives or "insiders" in power or commercial structures. Hence, youth demonstrate a steady tendency towards lowering the moral threshold, and if it persists, life in an amoral state may become a norm.

The oppositional political elite:

familiar traits in a looking glass

The oppositional political elite claims the role of a truly new elite. To be sure, the very existence of the institutionalised political opposition represented in Parliament is a positive phenomenon. The existence of the opposition makes the socio-political process in the country more dynamic; shows the presence of alternative views among the political elite; and creates possibilities for control over the actions of the authorities through parliamentary activity, opposition media and public forums. This makes the authorities more transparent and to some extent prevents abuses on their part.

At the same time, the Ukrainian opposition generally has the same roots as the ruling elite, and therefore bears many traits of the latter. Parliamentary factions of the opposition parties and blocs also include representatives of big and medium business, for whom the main essence of their parliamentary activity lies in the protection of their business by political means, the desire to avoid re-division of property or diminish the resultant losses.

Just like the authorities, the opposition tends to practise politics behind the scenes. The examples include the support by some opposition factions for the programme of the Yanukovich Government (politically and ideologically alien to them) and the a posteriori confirmation by the CPU and SPU leaders of the fact of their secret negotiations with the head of the Presidential Administration about the left factions' support for the bill on amendments to the Constitution drawn up by the Presidential Administration.

Just like the authorities, the opposition demonstrates aggressiveness towards opponents and will hardly give up political pressure on them. For instance, in its media (first of all, in the press) the opposition elite resorts to the same aggressive wording and demonstrates that it is not ready for a compromise. It is next to impossible to find in the opposition publications unbiased, neutral information about events involving, say, the country's President or the head of the Presidential Administration. Hence, the authorities and the opposition wage a "war for extermination". And today, there are no reasons to hope that the situation would change when the parties change over.

Just like the ruling elite, representatives of the opposition have not learned to agree with each other,

as was demonstrated by numerous difficulties among the opposition factions during voting in Parliament, as well as by the issue of joint participation in the presidential elections or even in the actions of protest.

The opposition, as well as the ruling elite, is unable to develop logical, coherent and minutely calculated strategies for the accomplishment of the strategic goals of the country's development; to give in their election programmes clear, detailed answers to the question that worry citizens.

If the opposition today mirrors the actions of the authorities, can it become a truly new elite? Won't it act in the same way, having come to power? Hardly.

Why?

The above features of the new old political elite, both ruling and oppositional, and their practical political activity make the strategic course of Ukraine in domestic and foreign policy uncertain. There is a colossal gap between the declarations and the realities of our political and socio-economic life.

For instance, domestic policy proclaims the democratic choice, the promotion of civil society, the protection of civil rights and freedom. In practice, a system of administrative democracy has been established in the country, whereby democratic norms exist only on paper, and in reality, the authorities exert ever more control over the choice of the citizens.

Foreign policy proclaims the strategic course of Euro-Atlantic integration and accession to the EU. In practice, however, the documents on joining the SES are being signed, which not only effectively renders Ukraine's accession to the EU impossible but may also lead to the establishment of a supranational body being out of Ukraine's control. Strategic partnership has been declared with 20 countries of the world, although only the relations with three or four of them may be considered truly strategic, not to mention that the interests of our "strategic" partners are quite often opposed.

Ukraine's ruling elite has more than once assumed some obligations with respect to other countries but not always followed them, which has given our country the image of an unpredictable, unreliable partner.

Why? Why, in contrast to the post-socialist Baltic and Central European states, did the Ukrainian political elite not achieve consensus at the onset of independence, and why has it not done so even now?

There is a widespread view that one of the main reasons for uncertainty and chaos in the political activity of the current ruling elite lies in the absence of a national idea, and that attempts at its creation "have not worked". In reality, the national idea did exist in Ukraine, as well as in the post-socialist and even in the socialist Baltic and Central European states.

In the referendum held in December 1991, Ukraine convincingly voted for the independence. The socio-political and international context of the referendum leaves little doubt about the meaning of independence as seen by its participants. One should just recall the slogans of the five years that preceded the referendum: socialism with a human face, democratisation, civil rights, freedom of small and medium business... And nearby, in Poland and Czechoslovakia — "velvet" revolutions, "return to Europe" and so forth, or, more definitely and clearly: democracy, the supremacy of law, socially oriented market economy and real independence from the USSR.

After all, it is the task of the political elite to clearly and distinctly formulate public aspirations, the "power", as they used to say, of the national idea that really was "in the air". Voting for independence, many of us, if not the majority, voted for a democratic, law-ruled, socially oriented state. Which in the end was fixed in Ukraine's Constitution.

But after the proclamation of independence it appeared that the political elites failed to reach a consensus on the ways of attaining this strategic goal. The majority of the elite of the national-patriotic tendency had no experience of state governance, much less any experience of state building, and finally concentrated on the introduction of the formal signs of statehood, including toponyms. Its motto was: "first build an independent Ukraine, then deal with the economy, democracy, human rights..."

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A substantial part of the left-wing political elite, in contrast to their colleagues in the reformed communist parties of the Central European and Baltic states, opposed the very idea of Ukraine's independence and the building of a democratic state and market economy, cherishing hopes for the restoration of the USSR and the socialist system.

Time was lost mainly on the struggle of different political forces for power, the division and re-division of authority, and this struggle was in no way about the different visions of the methods of attainment of the strategic goal set by society.

The struggle was dictated largely (if not solely) by economic interests and concentrated on which group of the political elite would control access to the distribution of the national economic and financial resources and conduct privatisation of the national wealth. The elite not only failed to consolidate society around a common goal, but also caused its split into the rich and destitute, which has remained until the present day.

The low voice of the "conscience of the nation"

To deprive an intellectual of his voice,  
he should be deprived of his audience.

Few would be willing to speak in a silent vacuum.

(Known expression)

It is hard to define the "conscience of the nation". It simply exists. It is easier to say who represents, articulates and formulates it — it is the elite, being such not because of its formal status but, under any circumstances, because of its public authority and public trust. On that basis, it assumes the responsibility and right to speak on behalf of those whose rights and interests are endangered — and therefore presents a kind of a political "protector" against abuses on the part of those who rule, and against a "meaningless and merciless revolt" by those who are ruled.

This elite mainly consists of the people of the free professions, the artistic, creative and scientific intelligentsia. This is because, first of all, they more acutely feel the pains of society and, second, they deal professionally with words, images and slogans and are able to appeal to the conscience and mind. They appeal through the institutions that ensure their direct connection with society: the mass media, the Church, the independent bar, free universities (by the way, the very notion of the nation was conceived there).

Why did the "conscience of the nation" not say its word aloud, to be heard by the confused society and the ruling elite, when the first rifts appeared between the authorities and citizens in Ukraine?

The reasons are many. We will cite only two.

First — the elite, being the "conscience of the nation", lost its audience and therefore the motivation for creation, along with the means of subsistence. The intellectual, creative elite lives at the expense of the audience — both in the lofty spiritual and in the earthly material sense. As everybody knows, to create for self-actualisation, one should have a "cottage of ivory". The post-Soviet intelligentsia, especially the democratic part that did not belong to nomenklatura, did not have one. When the rift — the rapid impoverishment of society — appeared, this group ended up on the same side as its insolvent audience.

Over the past 10 years, more than 6,000 intellectuals have left the country. Many thousands changed their occupation, to survive. Thousands may be raising their voices against the abuses on the part of the ruling elite, but few hear them — mainly because the ruling elite took care to control the mass media accessible to the insolvent population, first of all, television. 74% of Ukraine's citizens are sure of the existence of political censorship in the country; 62% of the journalists polled by Razumkov Centre reported that they had personally come into contact with its manifestations.

On the other hand, few people out of the almost forty million of the country's adult population know what is published in uncontrolled newspapers with a circulation of several thousand, books published in print runs of several hundred copies, Internet publications accessible to a meagre six per cent of the country's population. Just as in Soviet times, loyalty to the authorities serves as the pass to the audience — live airtime, noticeable circulation. As in Soviet times, an information vacuum has been created around disloyal intellectuals; they are essentially pushed to the periphery of public and political life. The information space of a country with a population of many millions is filled with endless hit parades, "soap operas" and thoroughly edited, "politically correct" news reports.

Another reason why the "conscience of the nation" failed to become a protector against abuses on the part of the ruling political elite lies in the absence of the nation itself. More precisely, the absence of consensus in society — first of all, among its "conscience", the intellectual and artistic elite — on the issue of what nation should be formed in independent Ukraine: the political one, or "the titular nation and others"?

No matter how challenging this issue may seem, it needs to be solved. It is caused by the peculiarities of Ukrainian history and the uncompleted process of the ethnic identification of Ukrainians, who for centuries had no state of their own and were divided among various foreign state organisms. This is neither the fault nor the misfortune of Ukraine. Our misfortune is that we still have not passed this trial. However, the foreign, European experience is inapplicable here.

In the Baltic and Central European states, after the fall of the common enemy of all democratic forces — the totalitarian communist regime — the differences between the various tactics for attaining the strategic goal common for all democratic forces came to the forefront. None of those countries had four Churches that all equally claimed the role of the "conscience of the nation", or such division among intellectuals into irreconcilable camps. We lost the integrity of the democratic movement of the late 1980s, having split it according to ethnic, confessional, linguistic and dozens of secondary characteristics. There can be no divided conscience; it acts as the "conscience of the nation" because it unites the nation.

The ruling elite, both that belonging to the nomenklatura and the new, pragmatic one, deals with a unique society. It is a society not only unprepared to live in the conditions of freedom and the market but also deprived of a strong democratic, in the most general meaning of this word, intellectual and creative elite able to resist the abuse of power. On the contrary, different parts of the elite appeal to the authorities in search of support in the struggle against opponents. The ruling elite has only to conserve the problem, reserving the possibility of activating and actualising it at any time, with a view to splitting the electorate, instead of unifying of the nation.

Possible variants of development

The number of possible variants of development open to Ukraine is in practice confined to two. The first presumes the conservation of the existing situation, with a strengthening of authoritarian trends ensuing from the internal logic of the development of the present political regime. The second envisages a qualitative breakthrough on the basis of European democratic values, which, in the longer term, opens the road to a united Europe.

Presently, both options seem probable, since there are objective and subjective preconditions for the realisation of both the former and the latter.

Option I. Conservation of the existing situation, gradual strengthening of authoritarian trends in the country.

There are weighty preconditions for the realisation of that pessimistic scenario.

The constitutionally provided system of state governance in Ukraine does not guarantee its effectiveness, accountability to citizens, openness and transparency. At the same time, there are in fact no means of public control over the authorities' activity, first of all, independent media. These factors exert the greatest negative pressure, for they create preconditions for the abuse of power.

In Ukraine, there is no middle class, which in democratic countries is the most numerous part of the population, the social basis of civil society and the bulwark of democracy. The low standard of living of the overwhelming majority of the population deprives the structures of civil society, not numerous in Ukraine, of their social base and public support.

The overwhelming majority of the population is in a state of political apathy; the level of public activity is extremely low, which in the short run secures the authorities against mass protests. Moreover, this allows the authorities to ensure the social legitimisation of the political decisions they require through the organisation of artificial referenda and public discussions.

And, finally, the political counterelite still has not put forward a clear, concrete and logical plan of action in the case of its coming to power, the strategy and tactics of leaving the crisis, the mechanisms of solution of the problems vital for society. Meanwhile, in its current activity, the opposition does not shun methods and means similar to those used by ruling elite.

This places in doubt the sincerity of the opposition's democratic intentions and its ability to ensure a breakthrough towards democracy, and gives one reason to believe that the rotation of the ruling political elite in Ukraine will not mean an automatic change in the nature of the political regime. There is a probability that, as is the case at present, it will not be interested in the supremacy of law; the elimination of poverty and the formation of the middle class (i.e., the improvement of the well-being of the overwhelming majority of the population); and the creation of conditions for the development of small and medium business, since such processes inevitably make society oppose authoritarian manifestations on the part of the authorities.

In the foreign policy dimension, this will mean the isolation (self-isolation) of the country from the world community of developed democracies.

In the absence of internal and external impulses for development, society and the state will gradually degrade economically, culturally and spiritually. If Ukraine goes that way, the consequences will be ruinous not only for the present but also for future generations.

Option II. Qualitative breakthrough on the basis of the European values.

This option is the most acceptable, given the historic prospects of Ukraine and the present social needs, and therefore desirable as the basis for consensus among different groups of the political elite. There are preconditions favourable to the realisation of this option.

Ukraine, despite the current crisis, has preserved substantial human, natural, technical and technological potential that in some respects does not simply equal but exceeds the potential of the countries already invited to join the EU.

The political elite representing the interests of the financial-industrial groups, primarily the big ones, faces a problem: how to guarantee the inviolability of their business and ownership from re-division and excessive interference on the part of the authorities? Part of the business elite realises the advantages of legal guarantees over forcible ones and is ready to "play by the rules", and the political elite is ready to establish such rules. The business groups oriented towards Western markets need the legalisation of capital and the organisation of business on civilised principles; those oriented towards the domestic market feel the need of raising the solvency of the population and domestic economic entities, which, in turn, envisages the leading of incomes out of the "grey" sector; those oriented towards the development of production should take into account the comparative capacity of the Western and the CIS markets.

Among the high state executives, there are people who even under the present political system can publicly state their disagreement with the actions of the ruling elite, if they run contrary to the national interests of Ukraine. It may be stated for sure that there could be more such people in a different political system. Under a different political system, they could work much more effectively. Furthermore, there is a weak but steady tendency towards the rejuvenation of the political elite. The youth that was educated abroad and shares democratic values, and are ready and able to work for their establishment in Ukraine, is gradually being integrated into it.

Meanwhile, power does not guarantee, as before, the accomplishment of the selfish goals of the political elite. In particular, this is demonstrated by the fact that the ruling elite has to work (and spend) increasingly more for the achievement of the needed result of elections — and at one point, it may appear that the results do not guarantee the repayment of the costs. Some representatives of the political elite, both in power and in opposition, begin to understand that it makes sense to outplay the opponents not through bribing their colleagues and the electorate or purchasing "dirty technologies" but through the improvement of the living standards of citizens. The authorities' evolution towards the consideration of social interests is promoted by the (slow) activation of the opposition forces, the activity of non-governmental organisations, independent and opposition

the consideration of social interests is promoted by the (slow) activation of the opposition forces, the activity of non-governmental organisations, independent and opposition media.

Hence, the very logic of the market and socio-political processes in Ukraine, despite all the deformity of the former and slowness of the latter, contains the potential and impulses for the choice in favour of European rules, norms and values.

If Ukraine goes this way, this will result in the gradual improvement of the living standards of the population, the establishment of democratic values in the country, formation of the system of governance accountable to citizens and strong civil society. In the foreign policy dimension, this will gradually bring Ukraine closer to the development level observed in the EU countries.

What way will the political elite lead Ukraine?

What we believe in is not lost yet.

(Friedrich Schiller)

The first step of Ukraine towards a breakthrough in the solution of the internal problems on the basis of European values lies in the rotation of the ruling elite at the constitutional presidential elections to be held next year.

Given the present situation and the steps taken by the ruling elite in order to bypass the elections at any cost, it may be stated that there are three key tasks faced by the entire Ukrainian society.

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